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Scraping His Way to Fame

NEW YORK — You'd think that Richard Crux would be among the happiest men in the world. But he's not. Here he is, the world's foremost practicer of pogonotomy, but he goes around down in the mouth and bleeding a bit here and there.

Richard, who is obsessed with his skill (pogonotomy, as you well know, is the scientific term for shaving), feels that the world at large is not sufficiently impressed with its importance.

Only a few months ago Richard, a Britisher, won a tournament and was acclaimed the fastest shaver in the world. Shattered all existing records, and trounced the old champ by shaving himself in an official 19 seconds.

Actually, he did it in 16 seconds, but was penalized because he missed a microscopic patch of beard and nicked himself in two places. The latter is why he's bleeding a bit here and there.

WHY HE'S IRKED

Now, Richard, quite properly, was presented with the prize — 50 pounds sterling, which is a tidy sum for a man who regularly makes his living as a computer programmer for an international mining company in London. But Richard is devilishly irked that no enduring honors seem to go with the 50 pounds sterling.

"Look, here, old chap," he said, "I noticed there's the Davis Cup for tennis, the Nobel prize for science, and there are all sorts of Oscars, and Emmys and Tonys and things — why, chaps like you even get a Pulitzer prize for your rather ordinary craft of journalism — but there's nothing concrete or glittering or spectacular for the champion in pogonotomy. Shocking, what?"

When he gets back to London, he's going to try to do something about it. He's planning to write to scientist Elbridge J. Casselman who made a four-year study of shaving and wrote a paper about it for the American Medical Assn. Journal. Richard believes that if he and Elbridge really jut their jaws a bit, they can establish the world's first Pogonotomy Prize.

I looked at Richard's face which carries the honorable scars, nicks, scrapes, cuts and welts of many a furious contest, and suggested that perhaps a color photograph of his face, what with the bleeding and all, might make a suitable prize to be awarded to the winner each year.

"I suspect," said Richard, "that you meant that to have an element of humor in it. Well, I'm sorry to say, it ranks with much of the humor I've heard since coming to America. Lots of chaps are fond of asking me: 'Did you win the championship by a whisker?' and 'How about throwing a match by shaving points?'"

Richard never thought he was a really speedy shaver until he read an ad in the London Times announcing a contest sponsored by Personna Electro - coated Blades and noted that the champion apparently took longer to shave than he did.

SHAVING TIME

"I've always whipped through my shaving," said Richard, "because I'm a lazy chap and I like to sleep as long a possible in the morning. Why waste time shaving that can be spent sleeping, eh?"

So, just for a giggle, he entered the contest and captured the prize through shear bravery. An observer told me: "I thought he'd kill himself any moment. I had to cover my eyes. He has a lot of guts, that one."

Richard has been touring the U. S., meeting and defeating all the little shavers who dare oppose him. He also has been giving forth on the history of shaving and is filled with interesting tufts of information.

Primitive man, for instance, according to Richard, shaved with clam shells, sharks' teeth and highly honed flints. He doesn't know whether they cut themselves more than he does, but he's positive he could have outslashed their best practitioners.

The Egyptians, he said, shaved regularly but, oddly enough, didn't like the clean-shaven appearance and took to wearing false beards, some of which were made of metal.

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